

VZCZCXRO8600  
RR RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHML #1275/01 1660822  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 150822Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4387  
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001275

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES IN MUSLIM COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN SOUTHERN  
PHILIPPINES CITY OF ZAMBOANGA

¶1. Summary: Ambassador Kenney's June 4th visit to Zamboanga City showcased continuing U.S. commitment to the economic and social development of Mindanao. The Ambassador launched the OneWoman Initiative, a USG-funded project to empower Islamic women leaders, and spoke at a U.S.-sponsored multicultural youth camp. Throughout the day, the Ambassador spoke with national and local media about U.S. interests in the region, engaged in Muslim community outreach, and encouraged Filipinos to watch President Obama's speech in Cairo. The Ambassador's trip also provided an opportunity to engage U.S. and Philippine military leaders on southern Philippines security issues of mutual interest. End Summary.

Background: Zamboanga City  
-----

¶2. Zamboanga City, in extreme southwestern Mindanao, is a multicultural crossroads for regional trade and economic activity. Given its proximity to conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, it also faces peace and security challenges. The U.S. has a range of development and security-related cooperation activities in Zamboanga, including several hundred military personnel of the U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), who work with Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) counterparts in a noncombatant advisory role. JSOTF-P is collocated at Camp Navarro with the AFP's Western Mindanao Command.

Empowering Muslim Women  
-----

¶3. Demonstrating U.S. support for the special role of women in development, the Ambassador officially launched the OneWoman initiative, a joint effort by the U.S. Department of State and private corporations in countries with large Muslim populations to support women's empowerment, including their ability to obtain justice, seek opportunity, and strengthen their leadership. The OneWoman Initiative's grant to the Philippines-based NGO Magbassa Kita Foundation was one of the first of five grantees worldwide. The USD 124,000, three-year grant will support a project titled "Empowering Women as Peace Advocates: An Interfaith Project on the Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building," aiming to provide women with skills for conflict management and peace building. A regional conference, provincial seminars, and local interfaith forums will reinforce the skills learned in this program and enable its participants to sustain the networks and personal connections they forged. In her remarks at the launch event, the Ambassador underscored the important role that women play in the peace process. Noting the attendance of senior religious leaders from the Muslim community, the Ambassador took the opportunity to highlight anticipated themes from President Obama's speech to be delivered later that day in Cairo, which she encouraged all those present to watch.

Multicultural Youth Camps for Peace and Understanding  
-----

¶4. At the Youth Camp for Peace and Understanding, the Ambassador spoke to an audience of over 100 teenaged youth from central and western Mindanao. She congratulated them for building friendships, cooperation, and trust across religious, cultural, and ethnic lines.

The USG-funded camps are intended to foster lasting bonds of trust and respect among the participants from divergent backgrounds -- Christian, Muslim, and indigenous groups. The camps also develop values, attitudes, and skills that will better enable participants to demonstrate tolerance of other cultures and religions.

#### Lending a Helping Hand with "Brigada Eskwela"

---

¶5. The Ambassador joined 30 camp participants in community service at an area high school that serves both Muslims and Christians. After assisting students, teachers, and parents in repainting walls and furniture, the Ambassador praised the spirit of community service shown by Brigada Eskwela (School Brigade) during the school cleanup, and underscored the importance of education. (Launched in 2003, Brigada Eskwela is a nationwide voluntary effort organized by the Philippine Department of Education to undertake needed repairs on schools in preparation for the start of the school year.)

#### Ongoing Challenges to Security in Mindanao

---

¶6. At Camp Navarro, the JSOTF-P commander updated the Ambassador on security cooperation and civil-military activities in Mindanao. Subsequent discussions over lunch with senior-level AFP leaders underscored the positive working relationship between the AFP and U.S. Special Forces, and provided an excellent opportunity to engage Philippine counterparts on a range of issues that included human rights challenges brought on by recent outbreaks of violence in Mindanao that have displaced tens of thousands.

MANILA 00001275 002 OF 002

#### Regional Media, International Perspectives

---

¶7. In two interviews with regional television, radio, and print reporters at the Youth Camp, the Ambassador underscored continuing U.S. commitment to the economic and social development of the southern Philippines, and the need for a renewed effort on the part of everyone - especially the young - to support peace by promoting interfaith and cross-cultural understanding. The Ambassador noted that President Obama would be speaking about his commitment to "A New Beginning" in engagement with the Muslim world at Cairo University that same night, and she encouraged all to watch it on television or read the speech online.

KENNEY